PROLOGUE

It was on December 4, 1905, that I first realized I must write down my experiences, without delay, before my recollections faded.[1] The place was St. Petersburg's central prison, the Crosses. I was a lad of twenty, arrested with members of the Council of St. Petersburg workers. The story I had to record was about the first Russian revolution.

. . . After hours of waiting within a ring of soldiers, the prisoners had been loaded into big police vans. The ride seemed endless. Our van stopped in front of a huge, grim building consisting of four wings spreading like spikes from the circular central tower. Again hours of waiting, in the dim light of the prison's reception hall. All of us seemed to be in a stupor, too depressed to talk, too tired to think.

Shortly before dawn, a guard took me to my cell. As in a dream, I saw the long corridor, many stories high, and endless overhanging galleries with rows of doors along them. "Get in!" The heavy lock clicked behind me. I fell on the cot and was asleep before my head hit the hard cushion.

A loud knock on the door awoke me. A guard shoved a piece of black bread and a mug with hot brown liquid through the square window in the door. "Your breakfast and tea," he explained, adding sharply, "Using the cot during the daytime is not permitted."

I began to pace the cell—four steps from the door to the opposite wall with a small window under the ceiling, three steps between two other walls. At the third turn I became dizzy. The next thing I realized was the guard's shout through the door: "Get up! Using the cot . . ." But I felt too weak and only fingered the bloodstained bandage around my head. The guard changed his tone and said, "The assistant surgeon will see you."

A young man in white hospital uniform was bending over my cot. He removed the bandage. "When were you hurt?" he asked. "Some two weeks ago," I answered. "A simple cut." But the doctor was not sure. "One never knows," he murmured, then asked casually, "What is the date today?" "December 4," I answered, "and the skull is not affected. . . . Only a slight dizziness!" "Do you wish to be transferred to the ward?" "No." "Then you may lie on the cot whenever you like." He dressed the wound and left.

[1] In this and the three following parts, all dates are given in accordance with the old Russian calendar: January 1 corresponds to January 14 in the Western calendar.